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Mar 5, 2025 · 16 tweets · [P_Kallioniemi/status/1897274236731056648](#)

In today's Vatnik Soup, I'll discuss the Russian shadow fleet: a network of ships that operate in secret, dodge sanctions, smuggle oil, and undermine the security of Europe's seas while keeping Putin's war machine running.

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To understand the shadow fleet, let's rewind to 2022. Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and the West responded with economic shockwaves. Sanctions were imposed, Russian oil was banned, and a price cap was introduced. For Russia, this was a disaster.

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Import ban on Russian crude oil and petroleum products

As of 5 December 2022, countries within the European Union will no longer import crude oil from Russia. And as of 5 February 2023, they will no longer import petroleum products, such as diesel and kerosene, from Russia. The purpose of these measures is to ensure that Russia has less money coming in to fund the war in Ukraine.

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S&P 500	5,778.15	1.22% ▼		Lutnick: US could announce trade dea
NASDAQ	18,285.16	0.35% ▼		US firm agrees to buy Panama Canal p

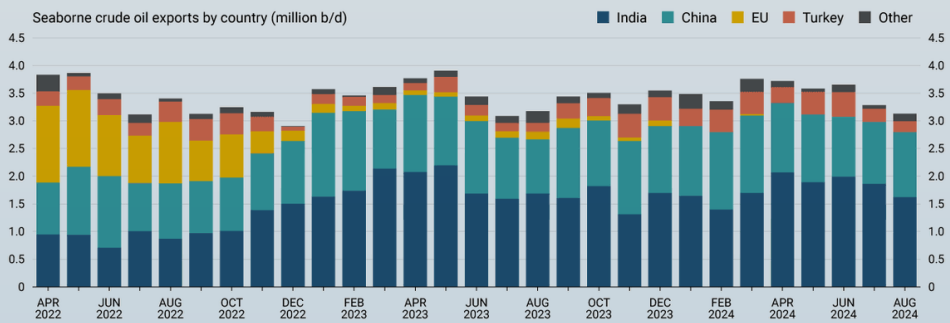
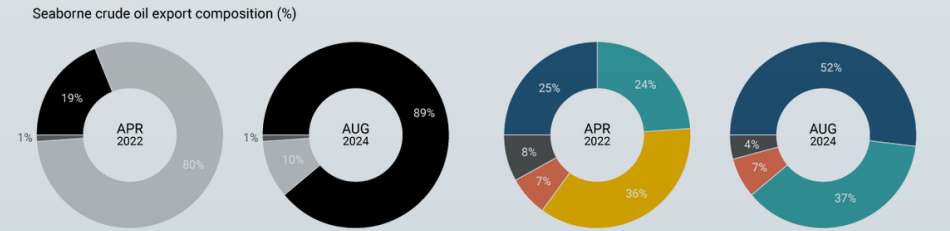
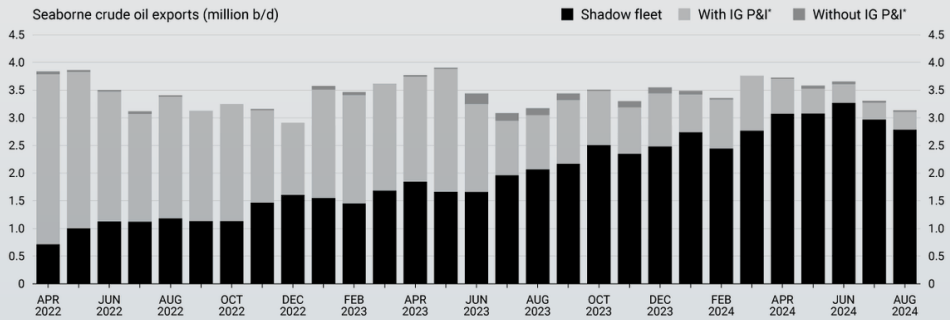
G7 countries agree to cap the price of Russian oil

By Alex Stambaugh, Julia Horowitz and Michelle Toh, CNN Business
3 minute read · Updated 1:55 PM EDT, Fri September 2, 2022



But Putin is well-familiar with economic warfare. Russia quickly created a “shadow fleet” – an armada of rusting oil tankers with false identities and forged paperwork, and illegal trade routes designed to dodge Western sanctions and keep the rubles flowing.

Russia's Crude Loophole | The Rise of the Shadow Fleet

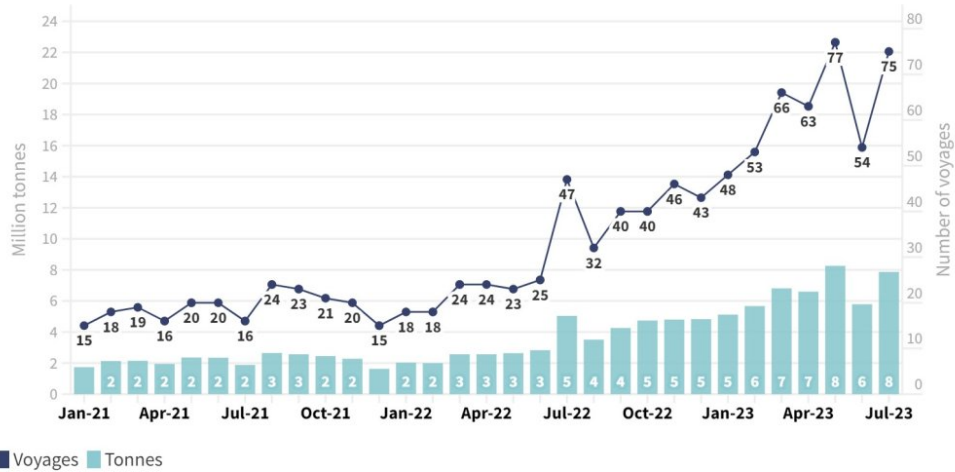


Source: KSE Institute * IG P&I - International Group protection and indemnity © 2024 Geopolitical Futures

Exported volume of Russian crude oil and number of voyages by "shadow" tankers

January 2021-July 2023

Million tonnes and number of voyages



■ Voyages ■ Tonnes

Source: CREA analysis • The first dotted line represents Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. The second dotted line represents the EU's sanctions on Russian crude oil implemented on December 5, 2022.



These ships are registered under shady “flags of convenience” from countries like Panama, Liberia, or even completely fabricated registries. Ownership is hidden behind endless layers of shell companies. If a ship gets caught, good luck figuring out who actually owns it.

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Open registries as an enabler of maritime sanctions evasion

Christopher J. Watterson, Stephen Osborne, Samuel Grant

War Studies

Research output: Contribution to journal › Article › peer-review

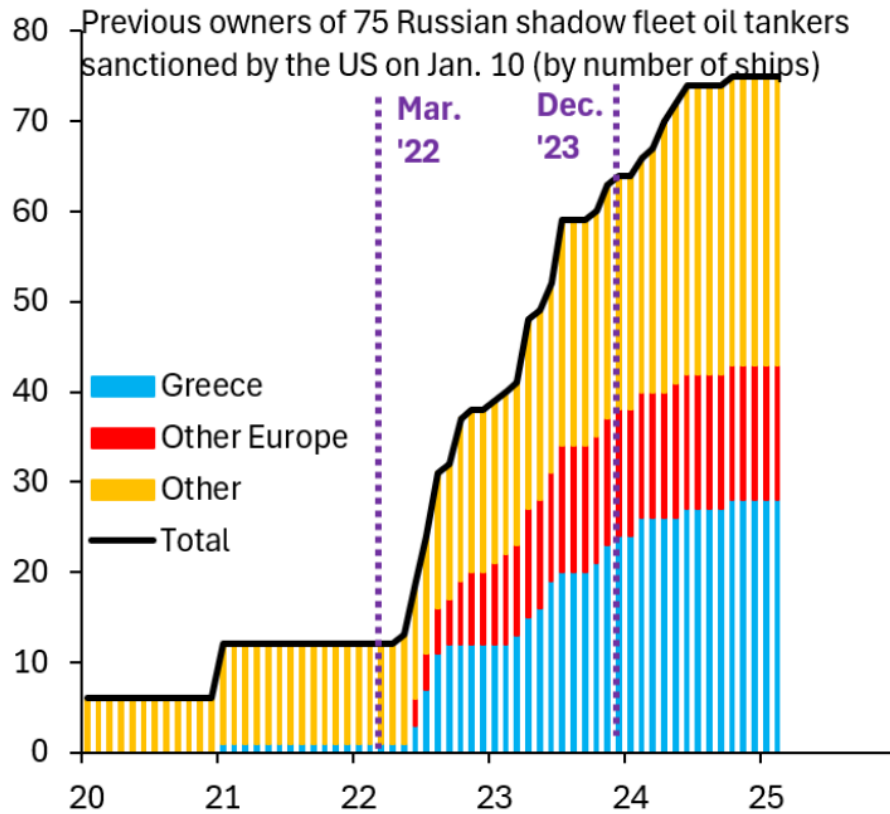
Overview Fingerprint

Abstract

Vessels engaged in the evasion of maritime sanctions are predominantly flagged by open registries: registries that impose little to no nationality requirements on vessel owners and operators. This paper investigates the causes of this phenomenon, arguing that open registries generally lack adequate measures for detecting sanctions evasion in their fleets and that they are targeted for flagging services by sanctions evaders. At the root of this vulnerability to flagging sanctions evaders is the for-profit nature of the open registry system which encourages registries to jettison regulation and oversight to increase their marketability in the competitive industry of international flagging.

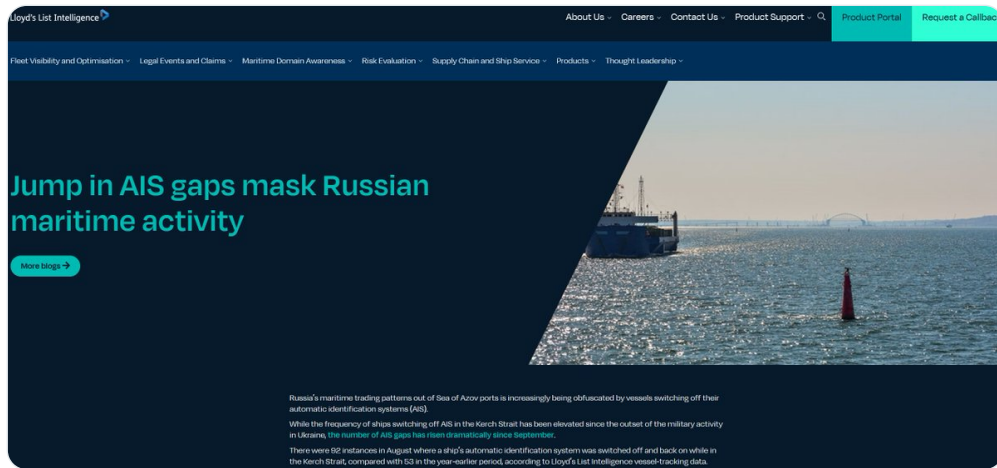
A focal point of the shadow fleet strategy is to obscure the ownership of the fleets' tankers and to mask the origin of the Russian oil those ships carry. To do this, Russia employs a host of deceptive maneuvers, such as repeated ship-to-ship transfers of liquid cargo, blending oil from multiple countries, spoofing ships' location data, and automatic identification system blackouts. Russia has also devoted unprecedented resources to purchasing aging ships from Western companies, obscuring the Russian ownership of those vessels through complex schemes involving shell companies and frequent reflagging of ships, among other measures.

Figure 2. Previous owners of 75 Russian shadow fleet oil tankers sanctioned by the US on January 20, 2025; by number of ships



Source: Bloomberg

The moment these ships enter sensitive waters (like the Baltic Sea), they switch off their AIS transponders, going “dark” on satellite tracking. This allows them to slip past authorities unnoticed, only to reappear days later in a friendly port.



Instead of docking at a major port where they can be tracked, Russian oil tankers sometimes transfer their cargo in international waters, much like drug smugglers. By the time the oil reaches its final buyer, its origins have been scrubbed clean.

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Russia's Shadow Fleet Has Moved Its Oil Smuggling Operations to New Waters

- ▶ **Russia's shadow fleet has moved its ship-to-ship transfers to the Aegean Sea to avoid detection and sanctions.**
- ▶ **This practice helps Russia circumvent Western sanctions and continue its oil trade.**
- ▶ **The increased ship-to-ship transfers raise environmental concerns and highlight the challenges in enforcing sanctions.**



The scale of this operation is staggering. Some estimates suggest that Russia has over 600 ships in their fleet, many of which should've been scrapped years ago. This naval black market keeps billions flowing into Russia's economy, directly funding the war on Ukraine.

7/15

HOME » POLITICS

Russian LNG ‘Shadow Fleet’ Operates in Norwegian Barents Sea



Asya Energy, called LNG Rivers at the time, in 2017 off the coast of Las Palmas, Spain. (Source: With permission by Alan Soutar)

Published at: Aug 22 2024 - 12:16 / Updated at: Sep 06 2024 - 09:04

Russia has a long history of using civilian ships for intelligence gathering. Some of these tankers may not even be carrying oil – they could be mapping undersea cables, tracking NATO maneuvers, or scouting critical infrastructure for future sabotage.

Russia's Mapping of Critical Infrastructure in the North and Baltic Seas – International Law as an Impediment to Countering the Threat of Strategic Sabotage?

In: [Nordic Journal of International Law](#)

Author: [Christian Schaller](#)

Online Publication Date: 21 May 2024

[Abstract](#) [Full Text](#) [PDF](#) [Metadata](#) [Metrics](#)

Abstract

Russia is systematically mapping critical infrastructure in the North and Baltic Seas. These activities are intended to unsettle NATO countries and prepare the ground for possible sabotage. The problem is that the international law of the sea does not provide coastal States with clear authority to prevent the collection of intelligence on maritime infrastructure within their Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs). This article argues that coastal States must nevertheless be able to exercise their sovereign rights with respect to the exploration and exploitation of the EEZ and continental shelf. Consequently, they must be allowed to take the necessary measures to protect the infrastructure serving the exercise of those sovereign rights. This argument could help to establish a legal basis for countering Russian mapping operations in the EEZs and on the continental shelves of coastal States in the North and Baltic Seas.

Another rusting Russian tanker with 100,000 tons of sanctioned oil recently faced a power outage in the Baltic Sea and had to be towed to the coast by Germany. It *would* be embarrassing – if Russia was familiar at all with that feeling.

Germany tows Russian shadow fleet tanker carrying 100,000 tonnes of oil – media

IRYNA KUTIELIEVA — SATURDAY, 11 JANUARY 2025, 10:16



The tanker Eventin, which met with an accident in the Baltic Sea near the German island of Rügen, is being towed east by three tugboats for safety reasons.

In Feb 2025, the oil tanker Koala suffered explosions in its engine room while docked in Ust-Luga, Russia. The vessel was carrying 130,000 tons of fuel oil, but according to Russian officials, no spills were detected.

Foreign policy

Oil tanker damaged near Russian port, Finland heightens oil spill readiness

Three explosions have reportedly occurred in the engine room onboard the oil tanker Koala in the Gulf of Finland.



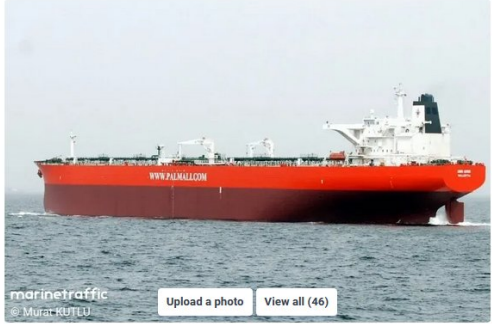
File photo. An oil tanker sailing near St Petersburg, Russia. Image: Anatoly Maltsev / EPA

YLE NEWS

9.2. 17:07 · Updated 10.2. 9:36


Incidents like this happen all the time, and the shadow fleet is an ecological catastrophe waiting to happen. But Russia can always shift the blame on others – for example, Koala was sailing under the flag of Antigua and Barbuda.

General



marinetraffic
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Name	KOALA
Flag	 Antigua Barbuda
IMO	9234642
MMSI	305262000
Call sign	V2YL3
AIS transponder class	Class A
General vessel type	Tanker
Detailed vessel type	Crude Oil Tanker
Service Status	<i>Upgrade to unlock</i>
Port of registry	<i>Upgrade to unlock</i>
Year built	<i>Upgrade to unlock</i>

Latest AIS information

Navigational status	Underway using Engine
Position received	27 d 3 h 36 mins ago Vessel is Out-of-Range
Vessel's local time	2025-02-06 05:57 (UTC+3)
Latitude/Longitude	<i>Upgrade to unlock</i>
Speed	7.5 kn
Course	162 °
True heading	162 °
Rate of turn	0 °/min
Draught	9.1 m
Reported destination	UST LUGA
Matched destination	Ust-luga, Russia
Estimated time of arrival	2025-02-06 05:00 (UTC+3)
AIS source	Terrestrial

Notes

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NEWS - 15.11.2024

Russia's shadow fleet funds Putin's war and risks ecological disaster

Greens/EFA MEP **Ville Niinistö** from Finland, shadow rapporteur on the resolution on the Russian shadow fleet, comments on the resolution on EU actions against the Russian shadow fleet and ensuring a full enforcement of sanctions against Russia:

On a more optimistic note, many Western allies see the threat and are countering it. In January, the Joint Expeditionary Force launched an artificial intelligence-based reaction system for monitoring the threats that the shadow fleet poses for underwater cables.

GLOBAL, NAVAL WARFARE

Joint European force launches AI-enabled tool to track Russia's shadow fleet, monitor undersea cables

Should a suspicious vessel be identified, the system can use real time tracking and instantly send a warning to JEF members and other NATO allies.

By [TIM MARTIN](#) on January 07, 2025 at 3:12 PM

In addition, Baltic NATO members have increased naval patrols to monitor suspicious ship movements. The alliance is also reinforcing undersea infrastructure security, ensuring that Russia cannot use the cover of these vessels to sabotage critical infrastructure.

NATO ships patrol Baltic Sea after damage of undersea cables

Kateryna Riabovol



For the Baltics, this is a matter of national security, so naturally, they are pushing NATO for a stronger maritime presence in the region. Estonians have been vocal about treating the shadow fleet as a military problem, not just an economic one.

And they're right.

NEWS > ENERGY AND CLIMATE

Baltic Sea nations eye new powers to seize Russia's shadow fleet

Finland's recent seizure of a suspected shadow fleet vessel has galvanized behind-the-scenes talks on grabbing Moscow's oil tankers.

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The talks gained fresh momentum after Finland seized a suspected shadow fleet vessel. | Antti Aimokoivisto/Lehtikuva/AFP via Getty Images

FEBRUARY 7, 2025 5:48 PM CET

BY VICTOR JACK AND GABRIEL GAVIN

To conclude, the Russian shadow fleet must be stopped. It threatens critical infrastructure and ocean ecology, while its trade profits directly fund Russia's war on Ukraine. This requires imposing new sanctions and strictly enforcing existing ones.



Shadow fleet tankers believed to be transferring Russian oil off Spain despite government crackdown

Tracking data shows two Hong Kong-controlled suezmaxes involved in potential offloading of crude off Ceuta enclave

13 November 2024 7:51 GMT *UPDATED* 13 November 2024 9:38 GMT

By **Gary Dixon** in **London**

The 2nd edition of “Vatnik Soup — The Ultimate Guide to Russian Disinformation” is officially out!

You can order your copy here:

**THE ULTIMATE GUIDE
TO RUSSIAN DISINFORMATION**

Vatnik Soup — Kle•art
Do your friends believe Ukraine is full of neo-Nazis and secret biolabs? Do you feel overwhelmed by propaganda and lies every time you go online? Does your mom think Tucker Carlson sounds reasonable?...

<https://www.kleart.eu/webshop/p/vatnik-soup>

The image shows the front cover of a book. The top half has a light beige background with the title 'THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO RUSSIAN DISINFORMATION' in bold, dark blue, sans-serif capital letters. Below the title is a stylized illustration of a bowl of orange soup with two vertical lines for eyes and a curved line for a mouth, giving it a face-like appearance. The bottom half of the cover is white and contains the subtitle 'Vatnik Soup — Kle•art' in bold, followed by a paragraph of text in a smaller font, and a URL at the bottom.

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